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ABSTRACT

Although college adult developmental reading does not enjoy the status of mainstream academic fields, it has made substantial progress toward that goal in the past three decades. Characteristics differentiating it from academic fields are its generalist orientation, its isolation from other disciplines, and its emphasis on practitioners as helpers, rather than as information specialists. It is apparent that new directions are being explored in the areas of diagnosis, materials development, and computer assisted instruction. To continue this trend, college-adult reading professionals need to develop an interdisciplinary perspective of adult reading and to provide services to their students that will enable them to meet the demand for the increasing literacy requirements of an information society. Six pages of references conclude the report. (LLZ)

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The Improving Professionalization of College Adult Reading

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This analysis follows and updates a previous report (Cranney, 1983) about college and adult reading. Readers are invited to review that article and another by Raygor (1970) for a more comprehensive view of the subject.

Often described as a profession in search of an identity, college adult developmental reading has made substantial progress in the last three decades. It does not enjoy, however, the status of mainstream academic fields such as chemistry or history. In remuneration and status, it ranks relatively low in the academic pecking order. Its characteristics however, are somewhat unique, differing substantially from other fields.

These characteristics include its generalist orientation in an age of intense academic specialization. Unlike most other teachers, developmental and remedial educators in higher education and ABE wear many hats. They are expected to be conversant with many content areas, teach, counsel, design and evaluate materials, and be familiar with learning skills of group and individual processes. They must know ESL, English, Psychology, study skills, and career education, just to name a few. The field especially stresses meeting the needs of the underprepared learner, often with a long history of educational failure and frustration. There are few others in higher education who deal directly with that group in a holistic manner and are as competent to offer significant help. This generalist orientation, however, is both a strength and a weakness in the minds of our colleagues in higher education. This generalized nature of remedial instruction unfortunately suggests to the

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mainstream academic scholar that this is a field without true academic substance and without a specific body of knowledge that constitutes its domain and expertise.

In many work and academic settings, the college adult developmental educators are also Isolated from other academic disciplines. In the adult basic education setting, teachers are likely part time evening school workers paid an hourly wage instead of a salary. On campuses, administratively they may be an appendage to an English department, a counseling center, or a college of education. Teachers often have orphan status, having come into the profession from lower education without credentials or training specific to their function. Their highest degrees are often in fields irrelevant to their day-to-day work.

Yet their devotion to the plight of the academic downtrodden and their accompanying compassion and sensitivity is another distinguishing characteristic of the field. For the most part, teachers are helpers and practitioners reaching out to those who are trying to succeed against formidable odds. Their commitment is more to people than to an academic discipline, more to helping someone to cope than to transmit a body of knowledge. They are not information specialists. As a group they would make poor used car salesmen. They are idealists whose hearts are often more involved in their services than their heads. This too, is both a strength and a weakness. As a group, tough-mindedness in instruction is not their strong point.

On balance however, there is progress in the field. An examination of different facets of adult and college reading indicate progress, although more

in some areas than in others. Generally these are in the direction of an increasing professionalization, however incomplete it may be.

The Literature of the Field, Teacher Training, Programs, and Evaluation

The literature of the field representing a diverse but identifiable body of knowledge has been substantially augmented in the recent past. The Maxwell book (1979) represents a comprehensive attempt to describe the profession and underprepared learners in campus settings. Two ABE books (Bowren and Zintz, 1977; Newman, 1980) and two anthologies (Johnson, 1980; Karnes et al., 1980) provide useful information about the field as does another recent IRA bibliography (Kazemek and Rigg, 1984) on adult literacy. Other bibliographies have appeared in the field (Cranney, 1983, 1984). A 600-item bibliography is available through the Center of Developmental Education at Appalachian State. The 12 volume Jossey-Bass paperback series about learning assistance (1980-1983) is an important contribution and a historical articles (Brier, 1984; Stahl, 1986) offers perspective and venerability to a profession whose roots go far back in American higher education. A book by Kelmig (1983) offers an excellent model and rationale for programs, and a highly recommended and readable volume (Sabine and Sabine, 1983) using an introspective research technique in adult reading is available. Balmuth's (1985) review of ABE programs is the most recent comprehensive survey of that field. Park's survey (1981) is also useful for a perspective of ABE.

Certain periodicals, newsletters, and the research of specific individuals are producing a competent literature and a useful research base for the field. Especially noteworthy are the efforts of Roeuche, Cross, F. Christ, and Boylan whose efforts and writing have provided scholarly analyses for more than a decade. These leaders have replaced a generation of

developmental educators who have moved into retirement such as Maxwell, Raygor, MacDonald, Spache, Schick, and others. Though some remain active, their contribution was substantial and they are missed. Younger, promising scholar-practitioners are emerging such as Stahl at Georgia State and Kazemek and Rigg in ABE literacy. The frequency of adult reading articles in the Journal of Reading is also markedly improved over a decade ago. The classic books of the field were the subject of a recent article (Editors, 1985) in the Journal of Developmental Education. This is further evidence that there is a growing knowledge base in the college-adult field. Especially noteworthy is the consistent high quality in the Research in Developmental Education (RIDE) newsletters authored by Boylan at Appalachian State University. More popular books such as Kozol's Illiterate America (1985) and chapters of the NSSE yearbook (1984) support the causes of the field as do many media reports depicting the state of adult U.S. literacy. Occasional monographs from NADE and WCRLA's Journal of College Reading and Learning also offer substantial fare for administrators, practitioners and researchers.

Few published articles consider unimportant trivia though most of the literature is not data based. There is no lack of literature, however, and it is growing in quantity and quality. There is a substantial body of identifiable knowledge in this field. It is somewhat uncorrelated and often difficult to locate but it is evident and increasingly professional in an academic sense. It does not yet approach, however, the knowledge base of the most traditional academic disciplines.

Slower progress has been made in teacher training. Historically it has been difficult to obtain training in college and adult reading. Only a very few graduate programs devote themselves to comprehensive training in

developmental studies although most colleges of education now offer in their graduate catalogs at least one course in college adult reading and a practicum. Coming soon from Appalachian State is a listing of programs which will provide current information on opportunities available. Streichler's dissertation (1980) continues to be the best piece of research on teacher training and a recent paperback edited by F. Christ and M. Coda-Messerle (1981) describes other programs. Commendable also are the summer institutes offered through Appalachian State University and the Learning Assistance Center at California State at Long Beach. The teacher training work of Norman Stahl and others (Stahl et. al. 1983; Brozo and Stahl, undated) at Georgia State University is also of value, especially as it emanates from a very active university basic skills program. There is, however, much need for further development in this area of teacher training. Part of the problem is that few colleges of education have teacher trainers who are knowledgeable and experienced in this field. While teacher trainers in elementary and secondary reading are in good supply, competent adult teacher trainers qualified to serve on university faculties are not. However difficult it is to find good training, prospective teachers are strongly advised to obtain competencies in math, writing, and thinking, as well as the in traditional reading and study skills. This reflects current trends in instruction in both higher and lower education.

A related area is the credentialing and licensing record in the field, usually considered a characteristic of professionalization. Although much has been said for over a decade by the IRA and NRC organizations about establishing standards of training, nothing has emerged from either organization. Nor are there state requirements specifically for the college

and adult field. More promising have been recent proposals by Commission 16 of ACPA establishing standards for learning center specialists (1984).

Community colleges, however, who provide the principal employment in the field, rarely require anything more than a non-specific masters degree. Some directors in the field look for certifications in other areas of reading but all too often employ people on the basis of personality attractiveness alone. Unhappily some administrators consider developmental or ABE education something anyone can teach and pressure program directors to employ castoffs from other fields. Disturbing in this regard are the findings of two studies (Landsman & Cranney, 1978; Gordon & Filippo, 1983) that most adult reading educators do have little specific adult related training in their field and recognize it as a drawback to their competence. A substantial percentage of teachers was also found to have their highest degrees in disciplines which are totally unrelated to their field. There remains much to do in this area to achieve professional respectability.

On the contrary knowledge of programs is substantial and has been enhanced by a number of recent surveys (Boylan, 1982; Lauridsen and Meyers, 1982; Roueche, 1983; Gruenberg, 1983; Lederman et. al., 1985). Compared to a decade ago, no decrease in programs has been observed although award of credit for basic skills courses is on the decline (Boylan, 1985). Characteristics of successful programs have emerged from one national study (Roueche, 1984) that have substantial importance. Eleven characteristics in that study are identified that verify and have extended Fairbank's earlier study (1974) a decade ago. These elements of successful programs include strong administrative support, mandatory counseling and placement, structured courses, award of credit, flexible completion strategies, multiple learning

systems, motivated teachers, use of peer tutors, monitoring of student behaviors, interfacing with subsequent mainstream courses, and program evaluation. This research is useful to administrators, contains a massive useful questionnaire and is highly recommended. It constitutes one of the more significant contributions to the literature in the past few years and has spawned other research based upon it (Osborne and Cranney, in press). Also worthy of note is Lindsey's follow up (1984) of an earlier study evaluating the status of ABE programs. His conclusion is there has been significant progress and that there is reason for optimism based on improvement during the interim period.

In the area of evaluation of services and programs, there now also exists a substantial supportive literature (Boylan, 1983; Hild, 1982) on the value of basic skills efforts. Noteworthy amongst these is a NADE newsletter (Boylan, 1983) which summarizes the case for developmental education. In a format useful for administrators, a succinct summary of evidence supportive of the field is outlined. It indicates findings on topics such as improved skills, retention, cost effectiveness, grade improvement, and student satisfaction. Specifically in the area of reading, Sanders' (1980) comprehensive evaluation and review of college reading programs is the most current and valued documentation in this area and Entwistle's older review (1960) of study skills program is still perhaps the best overview of the study skills field. Information on the evaluation of services is well presented in Walvekar's paperback volume (1981) and in Maxwell's book (1979). As previously indicated, the knowledge base and varieties of evaluation frameworks available to the practitioner are now substantial. Administrators and teachers should know how to collect, analyze, and design and publicize evaluations that

consider data on self report, usage, retention, G.P.A., cost effectiveness, etc.

Of special note is the contribution of the computer to data collection and design of evaluation studies. O'Hear's description (O'Hear and Pherson, 1982) of a program that provides ongoing data each term with a comparison control group is a useful contribution to the evaluation literature. It indicates the potential and relative ease of regularly evaluating programs with newer technology.

Willingness to conduct evaluation studies and face up to their findings is a sign of a maturing profession. Retention seems to be the most popular current criteria of improvement but administrators in these times of funding shortages would also do well to learn ways to generate data on cost effectiveness. Since college adult reading is a field that must constantly justify its existence, evaluation methods and studies will probably be of continuing and increased importance in the future.

Diagnosis and Testing, Materials, CAI, and Professional Organizations

In other areas of the field: diagnosis, materials, computer assisted instruction, and professional organizations, change, improvement, and new directions are also apparent.

In testing, Boylan's analysis (1985) of regional studies identifies the five most used standardized tests in the field and evaluates each: Nelson Denny, California, the Comprehensive Guidance and Placement Test, Stanford, and the Sequential Test of Educational Progress. Boylan, however, considers these tests more useful for pre-screening devices rather than diagnosis. They provide general rather than specific information and should be supplemented by other testing. Particular concern about the use of the most popular test, the

Nelson Denny, is a reoccurring theme in the test literature. Several studies (Raygor and Flippo, 1980; Webb, 1983) indicate its inappropriateness for use with low level readers. Users of this test and others should be familiar with the evaluation literature about the tests and other assessment instruments they use.

There is a clear dissatisfaction with available standardized testing for developmental and ABE students. Most tests are too difficult, child rather than adult oriented, and inappropriate for detailed diagnosis, prescription and instruction. Though newer tests exist (Raygor, 1981), many appear to be culture biased, and the high costs of test development probably explain the slow progress in this area. The testing industry, however, has committed itself publicly to the development of a new generation of tests. This is in response to criticism that traditional, standardized tests do not serve well the clientele of college and adult remedial instruction.

Newer concerns in testing include an interest in individual learning styles. The right brain-left brain literature continues to flourish and has supported a trend towards individualized instruction. A few informal unstandardized inventories in this area exist. More visible are the learning style inventories such as the Canfield and the Kolb. Conceptually they have an appeal to developmental educators but their psychometric characteristics and rather fragile research base should be carefully studied to see what contributions they offer. A report by Boylan (1986) is helpful in understanding such tests. The Meyers Briggs Inventory (Lawerence, 1982) is another test that is less well known but may have promise for college adult reading educators. A substantial research base for that test has been accumulated by Mary Macauley at the University of Florida.

Other developments include the administration and scoring of tests on computers and the growing use of teacher and institution made tests for local use, placement and diagnosis. When such tests are followed by validation research, they can make an important contribution. Other tests in common use are mastery and work sample measures, often employed as progress checks in instructional modules. Formal criterion referenced tests of the APL variety have not prospered but are considered promising as a type of measurement for research, instruction, and evaluation. Establishing cutoff scores however can be a problem with such tests. Newer attempts to match reading skills with the difficulty of reading materials such as the DRP procedure are growing in use but have not as yet had much impact on this field. They offer a departure from traditional testing procedures and are based on the cloze procedure, a testing device which has attracted some recent criticism. A similar statement can be made about the much publicized miscue analysis. Whatever its merits, the length of the testing procedure may prohibit its use in this field. On balance however, the profession has become more sophisticated in its use of tests. Local norms, concern for standard errors of measurement, better manuals and multiple approaches to assessment and diagnosis are in evidence. Scattered programs may also measure vision, hearing, attitudes, and eye movements though this is more the exception than the rule. With older adult populations however, this type of testing is useful and recommended.

Statewide testing programs are commendably in evidence. The New Jersey effort (Morante et. al: 1984, 1984) is the most well known and Florida amongst others has instituted mandatory testing in the college years that provides indirect support to the field. In the related area of writing, holistic scoring is in vogue and is reflected in revised college entrance exams.

Knowledge of the rules of grammar are receiving less emphasis than formerly in writing instruction. Writing and thinking skills incidentally are being related to and taught with reading. This is an important current trend and an improvement on traditional instruction.

Adult reading materials now exist in abundance. In general they have improved somewhat in quality and most now are aimed directly at adults rather than adapted from children's materials which was the practice two decades ago. Guidelines for materials evaluation are now also available (Newman, 1981). Kits, modules, and bits and pieces of flexible materials are more used than single systems or textbooks all of which is a healthy sign for instruction. There is a sufficient variety of materials available to refute the accusations of a few years ago that materials were controlling instruction. Practitioners, however, are well advised to give materials a period of tryout before purchase decisions are made. What works for one instructor may not for another.

Computer use and its status in the field is more difficult to assess. Well accepted, however, is computer use for storage and monitoring of student records. Most practitioners realize the value of keeping close track of student progress, and the computer has proved to be a great help in this area. Previous mention has been made of computer use in evaluation. In instruction, however, the overall picture is cloudy and the jury is still out. Rapid changes in technology, a shaking out of the industry, a downturn in the use of home personal computers, and the substantial though decreasing costs of hardware have led to a "wait and see" attitude by many in the profession. Incompatibility of software with various computer systems continues as a major problem for educators on restricted budgets.

On the positive side, computer instruction is useful and will become more so. Their word processing capabilities have application to writing instruction especially in the revision and editing stages. Practice and drill supplements to instruction especially in math have well established themselves. Testing by computer is convenient and rapid in getting scores back quickly to teachers and students. Swarts' study (1985) of 181 community colleges indicated about half of the respondents were using or planning to use CAI in their developmental programs. Seventy-one reading software packages were found in her survey but only four: Comprehension Power, The Speed Reader, Plato, and Word Attack, were cited with any frequency. Locally developed software in reading was also indicated and the Apple Computer was by far the most widely used in her sample. Helpful guides to software selection are available such as Miles' publication for NADE (1984). More CAI programs are undoubtedly forthcoming however and the field should be monitored closely for what it will offer in the future. F. Christ articles in the Journal of Developmental Education have provided help to keep up with this fast changing field. At the present time, however, the glittering promises of CAI should be considered in the light of the many excellent traditional materials available at much lower cost. In addition, developmental students especially need a warm, human, and supportive kind of teaching that CAI cannot in total provide.

In recent years the growth of professional organizations in college-adult-developmental reading has been substantial and is important evidence of the increasing professionalization of the field. Primary organizations are the Western College Reading and Learning Association and the National Association for Developmental Education, both of which experienced name changes since 1980. Commission 16 of American College Personal Association

has also made a contribution. Among other active organizations are the College Reading Association, the American Reading Forum, and the College Reading Improvement group, a special interest area of the IRA. Most of these groups have annual meetings and publications of varying types. In importance they have replaced the National Reading Conference which dominated the field in the era 1952-1975. Especially noteworthy and evidence of a maturing profession are the growth of state organizations in this field. Independent state groups and others attached to national organizations appear to be vigorous and active in such states as Florida, Texas, New York, and South Carolina. This provides stimulation for locally based groups to share concerns, resources, and new knowledge. It also protects travel budgets which are usually the first to disappear.

Professional concerns and involvements of most members in this field, however, need upgrading. Teachers need to know that they will <u>teach better</u> if they take the time and the money to read the literature of the field, purchase subscriptions, evaluate and research their programs, go to conventions and reflect on what they do. They also should protect the time for the self-renewal that professional activity beyond teaching will bring. Occasionally they should take time to write about what they know that might help others in their field. Outlets for such writing are abundant as indicated in an IRA publication (Kline, 1981) that lists over 40 publications interested in adult reading. Whatever the form, there exists a positive relationship between professional activities and good teaching. As a profession, even though teachers in ABE and community college settings are not rewarded for it, much more improvement in this area is desireable. Teachers who teach all of the time and do nothing else are subject to decreasing effectiveness, burnout,

boredom, and obsolescence. As time goes on, they will find less meaning and enjoyment in their work.

What of the Future?

College-Adult reading professionals do well to observe events in related fields and organizations. Adult reading habits and research are monitored closely by the Center for the Book in the Library of Congress (Cranney, 1984). Its publications and free newsletters are relevant sources of information that offer an interdisciplinary perspective of adult reading. Also relevant is the literature of reading in the workplace available through the research of Sticht (1975), Mikulecky (1984), and others. It is evident that reading at work is different from reading in school. Since many students need to cope with the literacy requirements of the workplace, teachers should be aware of what those reading characteristics are and modify their instruction accordingly. Reading among the aged, in the military, and within corporations and specific occupations are areas also worthy of attention. Also currently important are the activities of the National Coalition for Literacy. They dramatize the plight of illiterate America and help our profession with their organizational activities. Unavailable at the moment but soon due are national assessment data on young adult reading. It will help clarify the literacy problem and tell better what and where the problems are.

As for the future, speculations by Cross (1984) and a thoughtful analysis by Miles (1984) are recommended reading. Some generalizations however are more easily made than others. Certainly there will be less federal support available for college-adult-developmental programs. Budgets will and are constricting. But public and especially media concern for literacy will undoubtedly continue and provide general support for adult reading

instruction. So also, the general concern for education reform, increased testing in the basic skills, and the drive for higher standards in the name of excellence will produce more students for classes in adult remedial reading. Increasing workplace literacy requirements in an information society are also supportive of the work of the field. A recent labor projection (Kozol, 1985) indicated the necessity of 12th grade basic skill levels for most lower level employment by the early 1990's. In addition, increased school expectations of basic skill performance will not only increase our supply of students but will probably upgrade our own programs. The experiences of Miami Dade's programs (Brannan, 1982) provide a valuable model where more is expected of students and standards are upgraded and enforced. Anticipated also is that the open door in community college admissions will most likely be not so open as in the past. Resources, however, may become more focused at the community college level and perhaps less so in university programs and ABE. Faculty jobs in those settings may decrease as decisions in tax supported institutions at state levels could direct resources to the community college level. This has happened in two midwestern states. Exactly how the current ferment in all of education will affect the college adult reading field is difficult to predict. But on balance, the field is becoming more professional and is doing better on most criteria than a few years ago.

A final note. A significant event in this field, not as yet recognized in the professional literature is deserving of attention. It reminds us of the importance of ethics and integrity in our profession. The story is well known in the media (Nack, 1986). A basic skills teacher in a major southern university was pressured to academically pass athletes who had not met requirements in a basic skills program. At stake was her integrity and that

of the program she represented. She did not acquiesce, for which she was first demoted and then fired. A recent court decision found in her favor, awarded her 2.58 million dollars, and focused national attention on college athletics and developmental education. More important, it underscored the necessity for principle and honesty in this profession. If a concern for standards of conduct and ethics is evidence of professional behavior, then we should all stand up and take notice. Indeed, we should stand up and cheer. That teacher, Jan Kemp, is deserving of our highest commendation. What she accomplished may become one of the more significant events in the profession. We would all do well to reflect upon it.

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